

Home-based Worker's Oral History



Jewellery bags for the rich, no food for the poor: Sheeba from Nagpur

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Sheeba, 30 years, sews jewellery bags and pouches for the past eight years in her Nagpur home. She had lived with her mother in the Taj Bagh area for the past 25 years. Sheeba receives a whole supply of purse-making materials from a contractor from the city's Satranji Pura area, and she distributes some of it to other women in her neighbourhood. She may make up to Rs. 250 each day for stitching 200 handbags. She earns more money by working harder, and making more bags. There is a chain involved in jewellery stitching jobs where the tasks on the various components are distributed among numerous home-based workers. No one woman can embroider a whole purse alone. While one woman worker is assigned the task of stitching the chain, another woman completes the sewing task. The piping work on the purse is done by Sheeba. She makes Rs. 250 for piping 200 purses, and Rs. 150 for stitching 500 purses. Sheeba elaborates *"Occasionally our machines need to be repaired, so we do it by ourselves because if we pay someone else to perform minor jobs, where would we save money? So, we also do the repair work of the machines ourselves."* While Sheeba did not receive any formal training in machine maintenance, she managed to assist other home-based workers in fixing their devices.

Sheeba had enrolled for a BA degree and even completed her first year of study, but she had to discontinue because of the poor financial situation of her family. Sheeba's father passed away while she was a little child, which increased the burden of the household. Along with Sheeba, the sisters laboured to support the family financially due to Sheeba's mother's sickness. While Sheeba is not yet married, she has already saved up for her bridal dowry with the money from home-based work. Sheeba's two sisters have already been married, while she is waiting for a suitable partner for herself.

Sheeba completed the basic level cosmetology training, but decided not to complete the advanced course since it would have cost her Rs. 50,000: "There are government courses, but I don't want to take them since they don't adequately teach anything. They only practise with one individual, so there is little potential to learn anything in government classes."

Sheeba's mother had passed away during COVID-19 pandemic. Once her mother passed away, she made the choice to live with her sister rather than live alone: "I used to go with my sister to the area where the ration (grains) are distributed to pick up the kit. There wasn't enough money and we had to stock up on food. Without it, I was forced to cope with a variety of issues, including those involving the acquiring LPG cylinder for cooking." Sheeba is now worried about her financial situation. She is currently saving little by little in an effort to escape the severe situation once more. Sheeba's family is afraid for their residence since it might be demolished at any time due to 'supposed' encroachment.

Sheeba has gained knowledge through her job experience and has learned how to save money. She has a desire to go forward and become independent. Sheeba claims that she doesn't need to go outside for this task because she would still make the same amount of money if she does. She has developed an identity as a result of her work, which motivates her to carry on.